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# SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1886.

## COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

SMALL-POX IS REPORTED to be quite prevalent in Brooklyn. During the past three weeks, twenty-two cases have been reported at the health office of that city. While this should not excite alarm, it should arouse all persons to the necessity of being vaccinated. This applies not only to parents whose children have never been vaccinated, but also to adults who have never been re-vaccinated since their infancy or childhood. We are in little danger in this country of suffering from the attacks upon this method of prevention of a most loathsome disease by the anti-vaccinationists, but we are always in danger of outbreaks of small-pox so long as there is public apathy and neglect in obtaining the necessary protection. So long a time has elapsed since small-pox prevailed in the United States, that there are doubtless tens of thousands who are to-day unvaccinated; and, should this disease once become disseminated, it will find so many victims that a wide-spread and long-continued epidemic may result. The experience of Canada two years ago should be a lasting warning to every nation, state, and city throughout the civilized world. Three thousand deaths in Montreal, and five hundred infected houses, was the tribute paid by one city alone to the anti-vaccinationists.

IN ALL, 3,372 members and associates presented together 522 papers during the recent meeting of the German association of physicians and naturalists. The American association for the advancement of science registered at Buffalo 450 members and associates, including ladies, and had a programme of 247 papers. One thing, however, must not be ignored in this connection. The geological congress of Germany held its annual meeting at Darmstadt, two days after the naturalists and physicians adjourned, and most of the geological papers were undoubtedly reserved on that account. Similar drawbacks may have existed for the other sections of exact sciences, which would naturally interfere with the presentation of a large number of papers, — more so, as the whole

organization is merely one for social intercourse primarily. The unstability of such an association is, however, beginning to be understood; and a committee of twelve has been appointed to report on a new constitution next year at Wiesbaden, and a permanent organization similar to those of England and America, will, in all probability, be the result. The city of Berlin appropriated about eighteen thousand dollars for the entertainment of the visitors, and the generosity and courtesy of the individual citizens cannot be lauded too highly. With the exception of hotel accommodations, which were poor at best, every thing was done by the local committee to make their guests comfortable, — in view of the large numbers present, no small undertaking indeed (3,372 members and associates, and 1,475 ladies). There was also an exhibition of scientific instruments and apparatus designed expressly for the visitors. Every thing pertaining to medical and sanitary science, electrical appliances, microscopes, model collections for school purposes, geological maps and models, etc., found here its place in the well-adapted halls of the Academy of fine arts. It seems that the German scientists are strongly in favor of helping in the formation of an international scientific congress, and any movement made in that direction will receive a most hearty support.

ANOTHER INSTANCE tending to establish the contagiousness of tuberculosis is reported in the *Gazette médicale* of Paris. It appears, from the account there given, that a young man living in a small French village contracted bronchitis. He subsequently married a healthy girl. Within a year he died of consumption, and soon after his widow also developed the disease. Their child, not long after, became a victim to the same disease. Not far from the home of this family resided a robust young woman who had at infrequent times visited her sick neighbors, but had never staid with them any time. She had, however, eaten the flesh of fowls which had died at the farm of the invalid, and, believing that these were most nutritious when partially cooked, had eaten them in this condition. About this time another fowl died, and an examination showed it to be affected

with tuberculosis, the tubercles in the liver containing the characteristic bacilli of the disease. Upon inquiry, it was found that the expectoration of the consumptive person had been eaten by the fowl. From the history given of the other fowls, it is probable that they died from the same affection. It has for some time been recognized that the milk of tubercular animals could convey this disease to man; and, if the explanation just given is a true one, a new source of danger, hitherto unsuspected, exists. That such a method of communication is probable cannot be denied, and should direct the attention of both physicians and patients to the absolute necessity of the disinfection of the sputa of consumptives.

THE RECENT DEATH of a lady in a Brooklyn dentist's chair has already been reported in *Science*. The coroner's jury, after an investigation, exonerated the dentist and his assistants. The lady, it appears, had called to have a tooth extracted, and the anaesthetic employed was the bromide of ethyl. The patient became conscious after the anaesthetization, but suddenly became unconscious, and in half an hour was dead. The dentist testified that he had employed the bromide at least once a day for nine months without previous injurious result. The jury recommended that in all doubtful cases patients should be thoroughly examined by a competent medical man before the administration of an anaesthetic for dental operation. Even this precaution will not always prevent disastrous results, for numerous cases of death after anaesthesia are recorded where a physical examination revealed no organic disease. It would perhaps be the best advice to give, that, when so trifling a pain is to be borne as is caused by the extraction of a tooth, persons should bear it without an anaesthetic rather than run any risk, no matter how trivial it may seem to be.

#### ALLEGED EARLY CHINESE VOYAGES TO AMERICA.

MUCH interest was excited in the Société de géographie at Paris by a paper by Dr. Hamy on 'The interpretation of one of the monuments at Copan, Honduras.' This is a stone in the form of a deep convex pie, with a round hollow or cup in the centre of the dome, from each side of which a curved line extends to the margin, which is surrounded by a border much like that put on pies by pastry-cooks. The two curved lines form a

sort of S-shaped figure. The whole stone is about a yard and a half in diameter, and its depth about a yard. The two curves are interpreted by Hamy as the sign Taë-Kai of the Chinese, which is venerated by them as symbolic of the essence of all things. Intercourse with China was inferred by Hamy from this sign, corroborated for him by the old story of Fu-sang, first broached by De Guignes in the last century, and by the papers of the late Charles Walcott Brooks on 'Japanese wrecks on the north Pacific coast of America.'

The paper was discussed by Quatrefages, de Charencey, Villemereuil, and others, the general tendency being to accept the idea of intercourse between China, Japan, and America at an early date, especially as Brooks stated that wrecked Japanese were able to communicate with the Aleutian Islanders without an interpreter.

We believe that the very wide hypothesis thus broached, and which in one form or another has had a certain currency for more than a century, rests upon a totally insufficient foundation. That wrecked Japanese, and possibly Chinese, from time to time were cast on the shores of America, is beyond question. The matter has been well discussed by Horace Davis, and to his paper Brooks is indebted for many of his facts. Davidson and others have also drawn attention to the subject. But there is every reason to believe that the wrecked people were, 1°, nearly always males, and incapable of colonizing; 2°, were either killed or enslaved by the Americans in accordance with a general usage; and, 3°, that neither in arts nor language have they left any appreciable trace on American anthropology. The statement of Brooks, that the Japanese and Aleuts could communicate without an interpreter, is true to this extent. I was present when the aforesaid Japanese, three males, were brought to the port of Unalashka, and took pains to inquire into the assertion which was made to me at the time. I found that the communications were wholly by signs, and not by spoken language, as the Aleuts could not understand a word of Japanese without its accompanying signs. Second, Brooks, who was long consul in Japan, informed me that he had particularly searched into the matter of the voyage to Fu-sang, and that he had conclusive evidence that the voyage which actually took place was to the well-known and still existing province of Fu-sang in Korea (see Griffis' work), and had no connection whatever with America. Last, the mere presence of two simple curved lines on a circular stone, taken by itself, proves nothing as to their meaning, and still less that they had any connection with the Chinese symbol.